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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001224

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2019
TAGS: PGOV PREL AF TU
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS: TURKEY NEEDS LITTLE
MANAGING

REF: SECSTATE 85136

Classified By: CDA Doug Silliman for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In both their public statements and private conversations with us, GoT officials have repeatedly confirmed their commitment to a free and fair Afghan presidential election. The GoT's dispatch of a 12-person MFA-led team of election monitors to Afghanistan substantiates that commitment. The MFA identifies the possibility of post-election violence by disappointed supporters of former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah as one of its primary concerns. Several years ago, the GoT had hoped Uzbek warlord Dostum would be receptive to increased Turkish influence in Afghanistan, but the MFA now evaluates him as erratic and unreliable. August 16, the GoT unenthusiastically acceded to President Karzai's request for facilitation of Dostum's return to Afghanistan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Turkey's primary strategic interest with regard to the Afghan presidential election is to establish or maintain access to the winner, which the MFA expects to be President Karzai, and to preserve a post-election security environment that accommodates the development and assistance activities of Turkish officials and contractors operating in Afghanistan. MFA Afghanistan Affairs Department Head Babur Girgin stressed the latter point during our August 17 discussion of REFTEL talking points. Noting that during his June visit to Kabul, FM Ahmet Davutoglu had urged Afghan presidential candidates to avoid exacerbating ethnic divisions, Girgin registered concern that some of Dr. Abdullah's United Front supporters would react violently to an adverse election result. Girgin worried that such violence would impede Turkey's extensive assistance and development projects in Afghanistan and imperil Turkish citizens assigned there.

¶3. (C) Turkish officials, notably Davutoglu, have publicly and privately endorsed free and fair elections. Our GoT interlocutors have registered no preference on an outcome. Consistent with its commitment to the integrity of the elections, the MFA will dispatch 12 election monitors to Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Wardak. Several years ago, the GoT had attempted to cultivate the Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum in the hope that he would be receptive to increased Turkish influence in Afghanistan. The MFA now views him as erratic and unreliable. The GoT acceded unenthusiastically August 16 to President Karzai's request for facilitation of Dostum's return to Afghanistan (although the GoT did delay the departure of the charter flight carrying Dostum for nearly 15 hours at USG request.) Dostum had been residing in Turkey as an official guest for more than a year. MFA Undersecretary-Designate Feridun Sinirlioglu told Charge August 16 that Turkey had tried to convince Dostum not to depart Turkey but had no legal means to hold him here. He said the GoT is encouraging Dostum to return to Turkey as soon as possible after the elections.

¶4. (C) Girgin did not anticipate pre-election MFA public statements urging Afghans to accept the election results.

Though Turkey would be unlikely to make such statements unilaterally, the MFA might be receptive to joining key international community nations in a concerted effort to forestall post-election violence.

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